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ABSTRACT

The words cooperation and collaboration are often used interchangeably in describing the efforts of two institutions working together. The basic issue of whether or not collaboration is different from cooperation was confronted in a project in which a national education research center attempted to work with a large school district in a "collaborative mode." Based on an analysis of the situation and the literature, preliminary models are presented for explicating the processes of cooperation and collaboration. The models illustrate the need for clarifying participants' expectations of rewards, goals, commitments, and procedures. (MLF)

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WORKING TOGETHER:
COOPERATION OR COLLABORATION?[1,2]

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WORKING TOGETHER: COOPERATION OR COLLABORATION?

Abstract

The words cooperation and collaboration are often used interchangeably in describing the efforts of two institutions working together. When used to describe methods of organizational interaction, however, each word represents a distinct mode of operation. Organizations usually embark upon joint ventures out of mutual need. Cooperative and collaborative modes each offer a unique approach by which the institutions might work together successfully, but which one is chosen depends on the expected rewards. A clearly explicated model of each interactive process is necessary. The preferred model would depend on the needs of the institutions, of course, but also on each one's expectations of the results that working together would produce. Conflict may appear when expectations do not concur. Each model requires a different kind of input and a different level of commitment, and understanding these helps make the interaction more explicit, bringing results which best match the expectations of the individuals involved in the organizations' interchange.

WORKING TOGETHER: COOPERATION OR COLLABORATION?

The author holds the premise that collaboration and cooperation, as descriptions of operational processes between either individuals or organizations are distinctly different. Each mode requires different kinds of input and each yields different sorts of return. Given the premise, questions to be asked are: how are they different; what requirements can be expected when using each model; what are the subsequent rewards; and, not to be overlooked, what is the value in distinguishing between them?

This paper briefly addresses these questions. The basic issue of whether or not collaboration is different from cooperation was confronted as the result of the analysis and synthesis of events in a case study on the "collaborative process." Because of different connotations people attributed to the words, expectations of what they meant as operational processes varied greatly within the same "collaborative project." Some people used the terms interchangeably, while others attributed very different qualities to the processes. Overall, while the participants' opinions were that the project had failed as a collaborative effort, they conceded that cooperation had occurred.

The case study supports the author's assumption that the success of a collaborative venture depends to a great extent on its clear definition of expectations by all parties involved, and a consequent agreement of the goal to be shared which will direct the process to its mutual conclusion. Without these two elements, true collaboration will not occur other than as a fluke. Collaboration is not possible without cooperation, but the inverse is not true. Collaboration re-

quires a great deal more effort, but ideally, its product yields more. Cooperation is possible with lesser effort because it does not require shared goals, although it also can be done more smoothly when expectations are clear. Collaboration and cooperation are both valued models, each serving a unique purpose, but in order to choose the appropriate model for the situation, their differences and their requirements must be understood. This paper offers a beginning to that understanding, and offers also a "rough draft" of models for employing either the cooperative or collaborative process.

Definition

There has been continuing and abundant discourse about interorganizational collaboration and interagency behavior pursuant to shared goals. With increasing complexity of organizations, social structures and society-at-large, there is a growing need for increasing interactions which are cooperative or collaborative, rather than competitive. One author succinctly states this sentiment:

> Since the (present social system) has become interdependent on a scale hitherto unknown, this has the implication that collaboration, for the individual and organization alike, has acquired primacy over competition. (Trist, 1977)

Any foray into the literature regarding the topics of collaborative or cooperative efforts on the organizational level will uncover the need for clearly defining what each one means in terms of a description for an interactive process. As often as not, the terms are used interchangeably. A rare effort to contrast the two is noted:

> Cooperation -- two individuals or organizations reach some mutual agreement, but their work together does not progress

beyond this level.

> Collabortion -- development of the mode of joint planning, joint implementation and joint evaluation between individuals or organizations. (New England Program in Teacher Education, 1973)

In cooperation, activities are mutually agreeable but not necessarily for mutual benefit. A metaphor may help: dating is a cooperative venture, while marriage is a collaborative one. Certainly some marriages never attain true collaborative status, but the general consensus assumes marriage to be a different way of relating than when the individuals were separate. Marriage counselors would probably agree that many unsuccessful relationships can be attributed to unclear or unmatched expectations by parties involved. Similarly, the "marriage" of two organizations, although temporary by definition, assumes a mutual goal. If, however, the assumed goals are not the same, "divorce" is inevitable. Should the same two organizations opt for a cooperative venture, an entirely different level of commitment is required, and the goals of each partner need not comply with the other for both to be fulfilled. Furthermore, the individual goals could conceivably be competitive, but the cooperation still be a success. A football game requires cooperation by both teams to stage the event, but the teams have a definitely competive goal. In a recent offering by Lanier (1979), this distinction between cooperation and collaboration is reinforced. Using the metaphor of the family, a mother <u>cooperates</u> with her son by allowing and encouraging his rock band to practice in their home; the activities are mutually agreeable, but not for a mutual goal. The family <u>collaborates</u> on a family meal preparation; they each "offer some form of expertise that is rewarding

to all...(which) contributes to the well-being of the whole group" (p. 408). These subtle yet distinct differences between cooperation and collaboration as organizational modes of interaction can lead to quite different results than expected by participants, depending on their perceptions of the distinctions. Because there are no formalized models for these processes, there are generally no clearly stated agreements on how to proceed in a joint venture. Each individual participating has an individual interpretation of the meaning of the process, and the extent of his/her contribution to it will rest on that individual presumption. This ambiguity of purpose was revealed as the essential difficulty in an attempt by two educational organizations to work together, described by the following case study.

A Case Study of "Collaboration"

A project within a national education research center, desiring to gain insight into the cooperative/collaborative process, initiated an effort to work with a large school district in a "collaborative mode." The project hoped this effort would contribute to the meager information presently available for other education agencies considering similar research efforts. It was anticipated that the school district's needs would be supplied, the research center's goals met, and that a descriptive model for collaboration would emerge.

The effort was documented by an ethnographic approach. After three years all of the primary objectives were not achieved, but the failure to produce a true collaboration of institutions did provide valuable direction, by way of learning what did not work, into formulating what might work. This particular approach to observing a

process in operation was structured in order to create a situation for study. Thus, a great deal of time and energy was expended in defining its scope and purpose.

A topic was eventually defined, but over a period of time changed shape. The final project only vaguely resembled the first topic chosen, and there was no certainty as to what was supposed to be done by whom. The original thrust for creating a project, to study the collaborative process, was never clearly articulated and that effort disintegrated from lack of attention. The entire effort seemed to have slowly collapsed into an indeterminant form, resembling a limp balloon that suffered from a slow leak.

That this collaborative effort never actually developed fully may be partially attributed to its uncertain beginnings. However, such a fate definitely reinforces the need for clear expectations and concrete goals in order for the collaborative process to be a success.

The participating organizations were a research and development center (Center) and a large school district (District) composed of eighty schools. The project for study was funded by the National Institute of Education. This particular district already had a long-standing relationship with the R&D Center which had conducted several research projects there, and many key staff members in both organizations were familiar with one another.

The Center approached the District in the fall of 1975, and after deciding, "It would be nice to work together," they produced questions: "How will we? What will we do together? What expertise can each provide?" The district seemed unable to articulate needs, although teachers and administrators could define problems that could be

translated into research questions. The evaluation division of the school district finally suggested an area of investigation for the two institutions to pursue jointly.

The District was concerned, after reviewing evaluation data, because achievement gains for low SES (Socio-Economic Status) students were not as high as desired. Various research projects at the Center had been reporting new findings relating to this problem. Specifically, key variables associated with increased achievement in the basic skills had been identified, new statistical conceptualizations and designs for evaluating achievement had been developed, and new hypotheses were being tested regarding how to personalize and more effectively implement planned change in schools. It was reasoned that, in combination, the data bases of the SES student achievement, along with the skilled staff of the Center and the District, had the potential for making a significant impact on the District schools.

A series of thirteen meetings were held over several months to develop an overall plan of action which would combine input from the Center's projects with the District evaluation data in order to discover just how to improve low SES student achievement. At each meeting, the same set of questions were posed: how do we initiate action; who will initiate; where do we get started; is anything happening; who might do what/when; what is the degree of commitment and priority; what is happening to the contract; where is the money; what is the scope of work; what would be included? There seemed to be confusion regarding many issues in both organizations. Finally, negotiations for the project were completed with NIE.

Collaboration would entail extensive analyses of the District data base generated from all of their previous evaluation studies. The Center would coordinate this effort; it would also review research findings and the literature to identify useful teaching approaches which held promise for influencing the achievement of low SES pupils. These two efforts were to result in the development of a concrete set of strategies that the schools and teachers could implement in the succeeding years. Following implementation, the application of these approaches would provide a fertile ground for further research and evaluation.

One of the Center divisions, of which the author was a part, was to document the development of this unique collaborative effort between a national R&D Center and a school system. As noted, this documentation was the original thrust that began the entire effort. Communication became a problem early on, with no specifically assigned role of official liaison. The eventual identification of various persons to serve in communication roles came as a result of need perceived by various participants and by the project director.

Over time, the project developed dual thrusts between the Center and two different District departments. One appeared to be structured as a cooperative arrangement, while the other was seen by most participants to exemplify collaborative characteristics. Reflecting on these two separate endeavors a District staff member observed that there had been no attempt to define collaboration very early on and that there were apparently quite different perceptions of what it meant to different members of both organizations.

Discussions of collaboration and cooperation between the staffs of the two institutions resulted in no closure except to go along with doing what was currently being done by the various factions of the project. Not long thereafter, the "collaborating" District department announced that "true collaboration" was simply not possible, but "A cooperative project with the (Center) that takes into account ...District interest will happen when needs and time schedule permit working together." In short, the collaborative structure collapsed with some pieces salvaged for their remaining value by individual staff members of either institution.

What Was Learned

A review of participants' perceptions of what process was actually in operation yielded interesting comments. It was obvious that there was no a priori consensus as to what collaboration was supposed to mean or what it must involve.

A little belatedly, then, an analysis was made to ascertain some salient features of the complex collaborative process and to contrast it with the apparently more simple cooperative one. The following ten areas of issue emerged as the literature, personal experience and common sense were consulted. Although these ten areas are part of either process, they are defined for the contribution required of collaboration, as it is the one which is most currently the focus of attention by agencies of all disciplines and highly recommended as the most appropriate mode for interorganizational relationships:

1. Needs and Interests. The extent to which organizations share interests beforehand will be a major determinant to their propensity

to work together. There must be a sense of gain for each in joining together; and when gain is mutual, interest is heightened.

2. Time. Participants must be willing to devote the necessary time to joint endeavors. A much greater amount of time is required for collaboration than for cooperation, since activities are shared rather than allowed. Many participants are engaged in many mutual activities; unilateral action, which is efficient in terms of time, is not effective for collaborative efforts.

3. Energy. Reaching-out, action-taking individuals are needed for impetus to begin and sustain the collaborative spirit. These kinds of people should be given key roles in the interchange so as to maintain a bonding.

4. Communication. Large and small meetings are an ongoing requirement. Frequent interactions at all levels across both organizations are a necessity. The collaborating mode is a sharing one, and sharing is grounded in continuing communication.

5. Resources. Collaborating organizations share funds, staff, and other resources. Generally, an effort requiring more staff time and energy will be more expensive. The rewards, or expected outcomes, must be worth the investment to each participant.

6. Organizational Factors. While the organizations are the framework, the people within them are doing the actual work. Certain critical persons can enhance or impede the collaborative process. Collaborating individuals within an organization promote similar activities between organizations. These people need to be identified early on and given appropriate roles.

7. Control. When participants are willing to assume more risk, they create a more flexible environment, and can move closer to collaboration. Control must be shared and a tolerance for plasticity must be fostered. For people or organizations needing stability, specificity and control, the cooperative model is more suitable.

8. Perceptions. It is vital for the individual in each organization to be willing to stand in the other's boots and view the world from that standpoint. This empathy enhances all the other points.

9. Leadership. This relates to #3, 4, 6 and other points in lesser degree. Strong leadership setting an enthusiastic, positive example by collaborating on many levels will encourage collaboration in the organizations overall.

10. Personal Traits. Patience, persistence, and a willingness to share are invaluable. Highly competitive, "do it myself to do it right" individuals are not predisposed to collaborative ways of operating in the world.

Obviously, these ten points leave plenty of room for further definition and inclusions. They are, however, a good conceptual base upon which a more precise framework of action can be built. The presentation of these points would doubtlessly have saved months of effort in communication on this particular project. Project participants, after assessing that "two different things were going on," provided an initial, but meager, attempt to clarify these "two things." An expansion of their initial clarification resulted in the development of the ten-point definition by the author. These ten points were further refined into preliminary models for explicating the processes of cooperation and collaboration (see Figure 1). The develop

ment of these models was declared by participants to be the most valuable piece of work to ensue from this study.

These models are presented in Figure 1. Model A describes the Cooperative Process, while Model B describes Collaboration. This comparison is, in the author's opinion, a good solid beginning, a provocative preliminary model which warrants more attention in the way of both application and research.

The model is fairly self-explanatory. One can see at a glance the vastly different expectations each process evokes when clearly defined as to what it will entail. One can also immediately construe what conflicts would arise when it is not clear which model is in process--when some individuals are using A and others are expecting B. Obviously, which one is to be used must be made clear from the beginning, and everyone must know the definitions and expectations of the selected model.

It is, of course, a cursory, bare-bones outline, but sufficient for clarifying necessary procedures. Each area defined in Figure 1 can be expanded, refined, and detailed according to the particular situation. It does provide a backbone for supporting an extended, variable mode.

Even a cursory review of organizational development literature might have offered some constructive input for the organizations involved in this case study. The work of behavioral scientists, social psychologists, management specialists, and others has specifically addressed the theory of an operation of interorganizational relationships. Thompson (1967), Eyster (1975), Esterline (1976), and others have studied the cooperation or collaboration process. In a recent

Figure 1

Model A Cooperation	Model B Collaboration
Steps in Beginning Process	
1. One organization (X) approaches another (Y) and receives permission to complete a task (research, analysis, etc.)	1. Organizations agree on an exchange of tasks, each offering the other a product or service.
2. X completes their task with the help, tolerance and cooperation of Y, but without much contribution of resources from Y.	2. Organizations join forces (personnel get together) to plan and execute the design of shared project. A "joint staff" system develops.
3. X reports to Y on their results, findings or whatever they projected as a result of their task--X develops a "product" on their own, but as a result of the cooperation of Y.	3. Organizations agree on projected results, outcomes, products, services, etc. Shared goals are arrived at and an action plan outlined.
Communication	
1. Organization X conveys information to Y at occasional intervals. X determines the nature of communication, although they also respond to requests from Y.	1. Communication roles are established and definite channels are created for interactions across the organization concerning the joint project. Many "levels" of communication are established, as clear information is the keystone of success in the effort.
Resources/Ownership	
1. Organization X provides resources and expertise, Organization Y provides access, setting, situation.	1. Both organizations contribute staff, time, resources and capabilities. This is generally defined during planning process.
2. Organization X arranges funds, may even pay Y for its contributions.	2. Mutual funding is obtained, perhaps from an outside source, depending on nature of the institutions (private, public, non-profit, international, etc.).
	3. "We" process mode develops -- system ownership.

Figure 1 (cont.)

Requirements/Characteristics

1. A problem area is identified by X and permission obtained from Y to research and/or analyze it; OR an area of interest of X is found to be profited by some association with Y, and permission from Y is obtained to carry out that association.

1. Both organizations expend much time and energy.
2. Action and risks are taken by both groups.
3. Many meetings, large and small, are arranged frequently.
4. Compromise is a necessity; various trade-offs are arranged.
5. A combined staff, perhaps even a staff trade or loan, comes into being.
6. Expertise of different kinds are contributed by each group (which is one of the primary motivations for collaboration, after all).

Leadership & Control

1. Unilateral leadership is characteristic.
2. Central control continues in each organization.

1. Dispersed leadership is characteristic.
2. Responsibility is delegated. Individuals must be willing to use independent judgment about assuming responsibility.
3. Shared, mutual control is ideal. Shared goals provide the congruity to the effort.

Figure 1 (cont.)

Rewards

1. Organization X gets its product. Organization Y may be able to use it. Organization Y may simply benefit from a sense of altruism, or social contribution.

1. Both organizations are able to share in a product and/or service which would not have been possible (or very researchable) as separate agents.

2. This shared product/service may be a release of a responsibility that neither one could have carried alone.

3. In the case of public service organizations the public may gain greater benefit from the joint effort than each separate organization could have offered.

4. The product of the joint endeavor can sometimes lead to a permanent relationship, opening the way for further sharing and mutual benefits.

5. Each organization can experience an expansion of possibilities without having to "spread thin."

6. Although more time/energy/resources may have been expended, very often the same time, energy and resources are ultimately conserved by shared effort. Duplication of services is sometimes eliminated while improving the quality of service.

paper, Houston (1979) implies that what has been done is not enough:

> ...the paucity of research on collaboration is astounding. The literature is filled with case studies and observations... (describing) conditions, designs, and dreams. Very few even attempt to analyze their operations (p. 333).

Houston cites the need for research which would address such complex aspects of collaboration as the structure of collaborative enterprises (organization, governance, management structure), problems of communication at all levels within and between institutions, and support and reward systems for the individuals involved in the group effort.

Beckhard (1975) states that making organizational interventions will not result in change (to more cooperative or collaborative modes) that remains in operation unless the following conditions are attendant:

> a. There must be real dissatisfaction with the status quo; a high enough level of dissatisfaction to mobilize energy toward some change.
>
> b. There must be in the organizational leaders' "heads" some picture of a desired state which would be worth mobilizing appropriate energy.
>
> c. There must be in the organization leaders' "heads" a knowledge and a picture of some practical first steps toward this desired state, if energy is to be mobilized to start (p. 424).

Schermerhorn (1975) notes the growing literature of interorganizational analysis and bemoans the lack of studies on cooperation. On the basis of a review of the literature, he suggests motivators which influence interorganizational cooperation (While he uses the word cooperation, collaboration can be substituted, with the implication it intensifies the points made.):

> Organizations will seek out or be receptive to interorgani-

> zational cooperation when faced with situations of resource scarcity or performance distress...Organizations will seek out or be receptive to the interorganizational cooperation when a powerful extraorganizational force demands this activity (p. 848).

Schermerhorn also summarizes the potential costs to organizations for these cooperative relationships: loss of decision-making autonomy; unfavorable ramifications for organizational image or identity; or costs requiring the direct expenditure of scarce organizational resources.

It becomes more obvious as the requirements for collaboration are reviewed that the necessity for clarifying expectations of the participants is of paramount importance -- not only the expectations of rewards, but expectations of goals, of commitments from each sector, and of procedures.

The point is that, although there has been research on the cooperation/ collaboration process, there has been little attempt to clearly define the varying degrees of requirements for the interactive processes so as to offer a guideline by which to choose the appropriate one.

Definitely, the interactive process begs to be studied. Much of what is written is based on intuition or folklore. A great deal of further inquiry, elaboration, and refinement needs to be done. Research that should be pursued is that which undertakes comparative studies of the various ways of interrelating: cooperation, coordination, collaboration, etc. The outcome would be the further delineation of the components of each process, with the costs and benefits of each explicated. What are the different types, their requirements, limitations, and which types are most effective when?

Relevance of the Models to Policy

The cooperating or collaborating process is a very complex enterprise; either process requires substantial support and investment. Currently it is quite en vogue for interorganizational liaisons to don the trappings of some type of interactive behaviors in the guise of collaboration, which has come to be touted as a greatly preferred way to work. The concept has seemingly been prostituted, as any and many relationships are labeled as collaboration. How many organizations or individuals are suffering delusions of collaboration? One has to wonder what behaviors are hiding under the cloak of collaboration.

Policy makers could find an explicit model of collaboration a useful construct in their conceptualization of interorganizational relationships. Models which provide illumination about the initial and ongoing requirements of collaboration could be informative to those who must make decisions about organizational behavior. Thus, policy makers who refer to such models would become more aware of the array of requirements that prepare utilization of collaboration. They may also learn that leadership roles and communication channels in the collaborative process necessitate special accommodations. Examination of experience-based models makes predetermined information on the rewards of collaborating available to the architects of policy. With such information it would be possible to select the most appropriate process to fit the individuals, goals, and resources of projected interorganizational liaisons.

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